A world not ours

The myth of progress and freedom in modern society

– in the words of Hegel, Rousseau, Marx and Fanon

The disease is alienation
The cause is colonialism
The cure is revolution
The destiny is freedom

(Fanon, F. 1963)

What is the role of human in the world today? As we often talk about the individual's pledge for total independence it seems like the necessary human spheres of solidarity and reliance are being overshadowed. As the western world is so quick to define and determined the discourse on this issue, we are left in context of self-imposing the consequential structures of this above-mentioned hegemonic discourse onto ourselves, thus critical thinking and authentic solidarity is being disregarded for the question of self-actualization and the capitalist demand for immediate pleasure. The deliberate ignorance that permeates the human consciousness is being further amplified by the so-called principles of freedom, democracy and globalization that Western society holds onto, creating a significant void between modern individualism and the allegedly universal values that binds us together. We face a dystopian reality, echoing claims of interconnectedness whilst feeling detached from ourselves and others. This essay seeks to relate the rising feeling of alienation within modern society, to the rise of fascism that we see taking place on a global scale, and, to the question of how the notion of freedom in modernity is being corrupted by the strive for individualism. How can we regain our solidarity and feeling of authentic collectivism, in an environment so fixated on the individual?

In the way history is defined and narrated according to the commitments of the storytellers to uphold the already existing structures of society, it appears to make a rather idealist picture of itself, which eventually leads to a manifest feeling amongst contemporary individuals of belonging to history by adhering to the supposed principles of the past. Instead of reevaluating our history and bringing culminating points in history into the present by examining our own role as citizens, we prefer to eternize and universalize what we claim to be the lessons and ideas from the past. Hence, there is a prevailing tendency of favouring the idea of collective human action such as revolutions, as it serves the foundational principle of western democratic tradition, in theory, over the immediate inclination of popular participation. Moreover, the idea of civil society's role in the political picture is largely romanticised and nationalised, altogether in the favour of the state, whilst we as individuals maintain the vision of self-legislation and liberty. Thus, there are several questions to be raised regarding both the issue of the relation between civil society and state, and the necessity of integrating individuals into a coherent social ethos for them to implement and convey theoretical ideas into lived experience and action.

As Hegel argues, integrating humans into their own social ethos is the very *sine qua non* for the for the human to feel autonomous and part of society simultaneously[1]. However, the default of the modern-day individual is their own egoism, echoing Hegels' notions of "pure abstraction", and embracing what Isaiah Berlin were to define as "negative liberty", denoting a process of isolation disguised as emancipation. The principle of universalism, however, resonates with the "moment of determinacy" which Hegel views as the necessary reaction of the will to the alienation that was the result of pure abstraction. The moment of determinacy does not negate the freedom of the individual but, on the contrary, realises and evokes this notion by placing the individual in the context of its surroundings. For what freedom is it that comes with no consequences, what is an act without a

[1] This is what Hegel refers to as the principles of particularity and universality, connected with his first and second moment of will.

response? Returning to the particular and universal, these two principles are the preconditions for civil society, and they are necessarily interconnected – each particular person can only maintain themselves through reconciliation of their universality, that is however, only insofar as the private and public life are connected. When private and public life are dissociated, the particular person can freely lose their integration into both history and society and alienation is a factum. How, then are persons to be made aware of their own authentic existence? For Hegel, it is the demonstration of the inherent and underlaying rationality that unites humans with their state and their history. Since the rationality in Hegels idea is synonymous with the state, realising your own rationality, means adopting the rationality of the state, in order to create a civil society. The pervasive reality of different interpretations set aside, the case of Hegel as an advocate for totalitarianism might not seem so mysterious, even more so if we look at his admiration for his own Prussian state as the rationally justified reality[2].

Relating the thoughts of Hegel to the prevailing passives towards politics, can be a meaningful to understand the necessity of viewing people as the actors, rather than observers, of their own societies. It is, however, also a way of understanding people as incapable of forming these communities and structures because they need the externally imposed will to do so, which Hegel justifies through his notions of indetermined (pure abstraction) and determined will. The claim that people are not capable of willing authentically, is the most efficient way of denying people the right to self-determination. The system of needs from which we emerge and in which we unavoidably indulge is the default of human nature and must be abandoned through the demonstration of rationality. This implies that there exists some sort of authentic form that needs external imposition in

[2] Referring to the claim “what is actual is rational and what is rational is actual”. Even though this statement has been interpreted in both a traditional and radical manner, it seems as the radical notion is more of a digression from the core issue, namely the contemporary reality which Hegel favoured. On the other hand, some sort of radicalisation of the statement is necessary in order to impose a meaningful interpretation onto our modern world.

order to be realised. Here, we see a significant distinction between Marx and Hegel, that is related to their different dialectics. For Marx, the state does not impose ideas on the people, it is the material processes of civil society that dictates the need of the people, taking the form of a state. Instead of basing his philosophy in omnipresent ideals such as the underlying rationality of man, Marx understands history as the process of class struggle, materially determined by relations of economic exchange. Relating notions of will to Rousseau, there is a clear connection between his relevant perception of general will (as opposed to the will of all) which manifests itself as the higher form of will, similar to Durkheim's "collective consciousness", followed by the claim that humans are condemned to be free.

With the capitalist systems permeating every institution of human relations, our demands and needs are structurally being abandoned for the sake for neo-liberal values, and due to its ubiquitous yet hidden character, our frustration and anger are turned towards each other, and inwards towards ourselves. The core of the problem of alienation is hence the multilayered capitalist system, but in a desperate need of a scapegoat, a human perpetrator, people seek revenge in the embodiments of this system wherever they can find it, thus creating a sphere of fear and detachment. As the individualist society flourish in its grotesque form - people seek comfort in the only security we know of, namely the state, which again causes us to distance ourselves more and more from our own community. The state which Hegel describes is in many ways our current reality - it takes the form of a paternal caregiver and provides the people with our *raison d'êtr*, our cause and our spirit. Rousseau's will of all could in this case provide a middle ground for understanding the necessity of collectivism within current day western society, as it emphasizes the relevance of people's collective power, not the sum of individual wills, but the result of coming together and articulate their needs, as opposed to merely adhere to imposed indoctrination.

With people being deprived of their own sovereignty through imposed structures of capitalism, we drift further away from each other and ourselves and neglect our duty and right to claim our part in the political picture, whilst simultaneously claiming our unprecedented freedom. The void between the imposed ideals and lived material reality becomes obvious in cases where solidarity is a matter of habit or convenience, and individual reality conquers the fact that the reality we witness around us is detached from our own. The rise of fascism takes many forms, but the pattern is usually that they amplify the voices of forgotten masses, not the general will but the scattered will of all, culminated into a sphere of fear, hate and anger. How does such tendencies emerge and how do we reclaim our sovereignty? The core of the issue is precisely the incarnation of history that we seek by evoking ancient power structures. People seek change but in the deficiency of collective cooperation and common participation, the already existing void between ideal and material world is further strengthened. Hence, people are left with the myth of progress, freedom and modernization to cling onto. As the term freedom is largely obfuscated by the various competing ideologies claiming it both their fundament and utopian goal, we need to seek elsewhere for a relevant and actualized comprehension, which could righteously be Frantz Fanon’s notion of social freedom, described as freedom of the individual, placed in the context of its society and state. It is the freedom of consciousness, self-expression and self-obedience. This notion of freedom resonates with Hegels determined will, and principle of universality, as the individual’s freedom is largely based upon its relation to and effect upon its political surroundings. It is, however, not the role of the state to provide us with this integration into society, but ourselves. Moreover, reclaiming solidarity and collectivism is not matters of reactionism, but of authentic awareness – people do not regain a lost human value by looking at the past, but by articulating their present needs.